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1914-1934—A Nation's Struggle for Security

Mary Mangigian Tarzian

THE ARMENIAN
MINORITY PROBLEM
1914-1934

A Nation's Struggle
for Security

by
Mary Mangigian Tarzian

Scholars Press
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THE ARMENIAN MINORITY PROBLEM

by
Mary Mangigian Tarzian

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*Dedicated
to my parents,
and
my husband,
Sarkes*

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

Foreword	xiii
Preface	xv
Introduction	xix
 Part I. The Background of the Armenian Problem	
1. The General Problem of Minorities	3
2. The Armenian Problem	25
 Part II. Policies and Activities of the Three Groups Most Interested in the Fate of the Armenians During the War	
3. Turkey's Policy Toward the Armenians, 1914-19	45
4. Allied Aims Regarding Armenia, 1914-19	75
5. Armenian Activities, 1914-19	99
 Part III. Solutions to the Armenian Problem	
6. From Versailles to Lausanne: Attempted Solutions to the Armenian Problem	127
7. Lausanne and After: The Allied Solution to the Armenian Problem	169
8. The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic: The Soviet Solution to the Armenian Problem	195
 Part IV. Conclusion	
9. General Summary and Critical Review	239
 Annotated Bibliography	257
Index	275

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	xiii
Preface	xv
Introduction	xix

Part I. The Background of the Armenian Problem

<i>Chapter 1. The General Problem of Minorities</i>	3
The Nature of the Problem	3
The Question of Self-Determination	10
The Values of Nationality	13
Practical Difficulties in the Application of Self-Determination	15
International Protection of Minorities Before the World War	17
 <i>Chapter 2. The Armenian Problem</i>	 25
Its International Appeal	25
Peculiar Conditions of the Armenian Minority Problem	26
The Bases of the Armenian Nationality	26
The Development of Conflict Between Turks and Armenians	29
The World War as an Opportunity for Solving the Problem	40

**Part II. Policies and Activities of the Three Groups
Most Interested in the Fate of the Armenians
During the War**

Chapter 3. Turkey's Policy Toward the Armenians, 1914-19 45

Presentation of Various Views on Turkey's Policy	45
The Facts: The Call to Holy War	48
The Requisition System	50
The Treatment of Armenian Soldiers	50
The Extent of the Deportations	53
The Disarming of the Civilians	55
The Men Are Taken Away	57
The Women Are Deported	58
Natural Difficulties of the Journey Increased	59
The Destination	61
What the Events Show	61
What German Officials Thought of the Deportation	63
The Young Turk Party and the Idea of Extermination	64
Motives of the Anti-Armenian Policy	68
The Significance of the Young Turk	
Action in the Solution of Minority Problems	70

Chapter 4. Allied Aims Regarding Armenia, 1914-19 75

Statements of British Leaders	75
Statements of French Leaders	80
Statements of Italian Leaders	84
The United States' Position	85
Summary of the Allies' Publicly Held Policy	90
The Secret Treaties	91
The Constantinople Agreement	91
The Partition of Asiatic Turkey	92
Conclusion	97

Chapter 5. Armenian Activities, 1914-19 99

- The Movement for Autonomy 99
- Armenians on the Caucasian Front 101
- Armenian Negotiations with the Powers 105
- Armenian Participation on the Syrian and Palestine Front 110
- The Movement for Independence 111

Part III. Solutions to the Armenian Problem

*Chapter 6. From Versailles to Lausanne:
Attempted Solutions to the Armenian Problem* 127

- The Opening of the Conference 127
- The Armenian Claims 130
- Discussions at the Peace Conference 134
- Recognition of Armenia 138
- The United States and the Armenian Mandate 140
- The Treaty of Sèvres 148
- Minority Obligations 152
- Events Which Nullified the Treaty of Sèvres 154
- Soviet-Turkish Cooperation
and the Fall of the Armenian Republic 156
- Disharmony Among the Allies in Cilicia
and the Gradual Abandonment of the Armenian Cause 158
- Armenia and the League of Nations 163
- Summary 166

*Chapter 7. Lausanne and After:
The Allied Solution to the Armenian Problem* 169

- The Opening of the Conference and the Preliminary Discussions 169
- The Sub-Committee and Armenia 174
- Minority Provisions and Related Questions 178
- Ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne 180
- The So-called Abandoned Goods of the Armenians 181
- The Turkish Policy Toward Armenians in Turkey Since Lausanne 188
- Armenian Refugees 192
- Summary 194

*Chapter 8. The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic:
The Soviet Solution to the Armenian Minority Problem 195*

Introduction	195
The Legal Status of Armenia in the USSR	197
The Structure of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic	203
The Development of National Culture in Soviet Armenia	204
Social Welfare in Soviet Armenia	210
Agriculture in Soviet Armenia	219
Industry in Soviet Armenia	222
The Attitude of the Armenian Nation Toward Soviet Armenia	229

Part IV. Conclusion

Chapter 9. General Summary and Critical Review 239

A Critical Evaluation of the Allied Powers' Solution to the Armenian Problem	239
What the Allies Might Have Done for the Armenians	240
What the Armenians Might Have Done for Themselves	242
The Soviet Solution to the Armenian Problem	244
Some Proposals and Prescriptions for a Framework to Solve Minority Problems	245
General Considerations Applicable to Other Minorities	254

Annotated Bibliography 257

- I. Manuscript Sources 257
- II. Chief Official Documents 258
- III. Other Sources 262
- IV. Editors' Bibliographic Note 272

Index 275

FOREWORD

During World War I, the Armenian nation suffered a two-fold tragedy: a tragedy of destruction and a tragedy of dispersion. To describe this trauma in the life of a nation and to classify this crime against humanity, Professor Raphael Lemkin coined the term “genocide.” Much has been written about the fate of the Armenians, the nature of the massacres, and the will of the Armenians to survive. One of the earliest is Mary Mangigian Tarzian’s *The Armenian Minority Problem, 1914-1934: A Nation’s Struggle for Security*.

This monograph was written at a time when many sources were not available. Voluminous primary materials in the archives of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Turkey, and the former Soviet Union; numerous eyewitness accounts, political discussions, and agreements were not available to researchers at the time. Yet Mary Mangigian Tarzian produced a major synthesis and balanced account of the events that led to the genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the rise and fall of the independent Armenian Republic, and the soviet republic that followed.

It is a remarkable book. Not only does it present the Armenian dilemma during and after World War I, but it also captures the international mind-set of that period in a way that is well-nigh impossible for a researcher writing today. The Armenian and diplomatic sources are largely unsuperseded. Nor has new historical evidence come to light requiring major revisions of this book written so shortly after the events. In any case, such a rewriting would spoil one of the great values of the work as it stands: it is a lucid and persuasive first-hand account of international legal and political thought in the age of self-determination.

Its central issue, minority rights, remains timely. As world leaders revisit the compromises of the post-World War I era and are tempted by revisionism, it is useful to have a book such as this to keep the discussion honest. Without many of the amenities researchers today take for granted, Dr.

Tarzian did a remarkable job of assembling and synthesizing a wide range of European, Ottoman, American, Armenian, and Soviet primary and secondary sources. The happy result of her efforts is an insightful case-study of the international legal and political paradigm for dealing with minority rights.

It is particularly fitting that this book should appear in the University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies series, now in its fifteenth year. The Tarzians' ties to the university as alumni and benefactors to Armenian studies underscore the poignance of this unique publication.

Vartan Gregorian

PREFACE

This study was undertaken in the early thirties and presented in 1935 to the political science faculty of the University of Pennsylvania in partial fulfillment of the Ph.D. requirements. Since the years it covered were 1914 to 1934 and the writing was done in the early thirties, it can readily be seen that the author worked under a number of limitations. It is not unusual for government and private groups, as well as individuals, to withhold access to sources dealing with contemporary matters of a delicate nature, until a certain period has elapsed. Moreover, time often, but not always, allows for the close examination of opinions and biases, upon the emergence of solid facts. On the other hand, guilty parties sometimes try to use the passage of time and the diminution of memory to alter events and “invent new” evidence to suit their own purposes.

I, as a researcher and an author, was quite aware of the limitations at the time I wrote. I was also conscious of a certain lack of interest in controversial questions, particularly when these seemed remote from daily American life. These were the days of the great depression. The crash of 1929 and its consequences remained a more widespread, immediate, and pressing concern. Too many people, especially in the United States, had lost too much to take up another’s burden.

Armenia and Turkey were lands far away. Turkey’s final victories, after its initial defeat in World War I, had changed its position and given its statesman and its leaders a certain popularity. They made the most of it. Hitler was proclaiming his belief in a master race. To try to destroy the Jews, he was soon to use many of the same methods that Turkey had used to liquidate the Armenians. Yet few took heed. Indeed, Hitler, as he made his plans for the genocide of the Jews, took counsel from the world’s indifference and short memory, retorting “Who remembers the Armenians?” In other words, nothing succeeds like success, even in extermination.

In contrast to the general apathy, certain groups pressured me to present one or another point of view. I resisted this. I was determined, as much as was humanly possible, to set forth my own point of view based on my own research and study. My aim was to present a scholarly and accurate perspective. However, my concern that I might be in error on any point weighed so heavily upon me that I was loath to publish my findings. I am a perfectionist. In spite of many compliments from those who had read my manuscript, I saw its flaws and possible weaknesses. A recent remark by one whom I admire, turning around a well-known maxim, "what is worth doing is worth doing badly," persuaded me to go to print. Along with others I became convinced that it is better to attempt something worthwhile, albeit imperfectly, than to do nothing flawlessly.

Finally, growing official and unofficial attempts by the Turkish government to deny all responsibility for the extermination of its Armenian minority in Anatolia (Asia Minor) spurred me to publish. Mine is one more independent voice presenting history as, or shortly after, it happened. That the dwindling Armenian community of Istanbul still survives does not disprove the fact that about 1.5 million of them were wiped out by the Turkish government.

Turkey has always been careful that Europeans not see or learn of its action toward its subject peoples. What went on in old Constantinople or new Istanbul contrasted sharply with what took place in more remote regions. Where is the large Armenian population that inhabited Anatolia for thousands of years before the Turks migrated west? The Turks themselves have acknowledged a pre-World War I population of 1,400,000 Armenians in Anatolia. The incontestable fact is that they are no longer there. And what about the physical and emotional scars of those who survived the Armenian holocaust? Children at the time of the First World War, now living as senior citizens scattered over the globe, still carry these painful memories. Moreover, there is scarcely an Armenian family that remained untouched by the atrocities and that in the privacy of their home does not mourn the loss of loved ones. It would be impossible for so many dispersed individuals around the globe to conspire to manufacture this physical and emotional suffering that is so deep and lasting. And why has it taken so long for Turkish apologists to fabricate a cover-up of the criminal acts in an attempt to exonerate their officials of the Armenian holocaust? Why did they not earlier produce those "official" documents, which have been adduced lately in the attempt to rewrite history?

I realize that since 1935 many excellent studies which deal in detail with various subjects covered by my work have appeared. I myself have labored over the revision of my original essay for many long years. I finally decided to present it in its original form. I believe it gives a truer picture of the sources at the time of my writing. The present in this book is, thus, the present of 1935.

The reader must constantly bear in mind that up until my dissertation, research on genocide was practically nonexistent. Comparatively little was known about Armenia or its people, except for the emotionally charged phrase "the starving Armenians." Incidentally, there are those, even today, whose knowledge has progressed little further. On the whole, minorities, human rights, refugees and their problems, were purely academic questions. Indeed, few academicians were concerned with the "lost cause" of Armenia. It was as if the starving Armenians had *all* starved to death. Communism itself was relatively unfamiliar. So not only were sources hard to come by, but also the subject matter was strange and remote and the scope of the study expansive.

All of this, in addition to matters of health, family, and building a partnership in a successful industrial enterprise, pushed back the publication of a thesis which should have appeared long ago. Inquiries from libraries, universities, and individuals showed that there was renewed interest in the subjects covered in this work. Although belatedly, this monograph now takes its modest place in the annals of Armenian history.

I would like to thank Vartan Gregorian and Tom Samuelian for their assistance in seeing this book to print. Any flaws, of course, are mine and mine alone.

M.M.T.

February 1984 - November 1991.

INTRODUCTION

The Armenians are one of the oldest nations in the world.¹ Ancient Armenian kingdoms existed on their native land, south of the Caucasus, in eastern Asia Minor, and during the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries in Cilicia. The term “historical Armenia” has been used as a convenient term to refer to all the lands which, at one time or another, were inhabited by Armenians and were the indigenous home of the Armenian people. However, no single Armenian kingdom since the time of the Armenian king Tigran II in the first century B.C. has extended from the Caucasus to Cilicia. With the fall of the Cilician kingdom in 1375, Armenian political independence came to an end, except in some isolated regions in the Caucasus. Since that time, the Armenians have lived under the domination of various foreign powers.

Before the World War, the largest part of historical Armenia and the greatest number of Armenians were in the Ottoman Empire. Most of the rest of Armenia and the Armenians lived under Russian rule. A smaller community lived in Persia. In the pre-war period, public interest in the Armenians was limited to Turkish Armenians and was chiefly humanitarian in nature. It consisted, for the most part, in attempts to alleviate the sufferings of the Armenians of Turkey when they were massacred from time to time by their Ottoman rulers. The Armenian atrocities and the deportations of 1915 made it apparent, however, that humanitarian measures were not enough to given any real security to the Armenian nation. A universal demand developed during the World War to solve the so-called Armenian Question permanently by liberating the Armenians from Turkish domination.

Meanwhile, Russian Armenians and Armenians who had emigrated from their homeland in Turkey to other countries fought on the side of the

¹ See Lehman-Haupt, *Armenien*, Vol. I, Vol. II, part 1 and part 2; Aslan, *Études historiques sur le peuple arménien*.

Allied Powers to help fulfill Armenia's initially modest national aspirations. At first, Armenians sought security in an autonomous Turkish Armenia. Later, as more limited measures failed, these aspirations grew into a movement for Armenian independence.

The public demand to free the Armenians, as well as the Armenians' own efforts toward liberation, resonated with certain ideals enunciated by officials of the Allied governments in the World War period. Statesmen declared that the new order which was to be built after "the war to end wars" would have as a foundation the principle of self-determination. Oppressed nationalities were to be given justice and security.

At the end of the War, many people in America mistakenly believed that the Allies had worked out a constructive solution for the Armenian problem and that the government of the United States had assumed political obligations to help the Armenian people. But as Secretary Hughes wrote in 1924, "Contrary to an impression which is somewhat widespread in this country, this Government, while it has exerted its influence in a humanitarian way, has not assumed political obligations with respect to the Armenians or other Christian minorities in the Near East."² But while the general public is now, in 1934, well aware that the United States government undertook no obligations in regard to the Armenians, there is some confusion as to what actually happened to the Armenian people from 1914 to the present.

This study not only seeks to give a clear picture of the development of the Armenian Question from 1914 to 1934, but also undertakes to integrate that question into the larger issue of national minority rights. On a theoretical level, the political and philosophical concepts prevalent during the World War have been reexamined and reevaluated. On a practical level, rights of people dominated by alien powers have been the subject of public concern and diplomatic action.

The problems faced by the Armenian nation were not unlike the problems of other national minorities elsewhere. The Armenian minority problem, like other minority problems, was characterized by friction between a subject group and the dominant group within the same state. The experiences of the Armenian nation have, therefore, been treated somewhat in the nature of a case-study in order to see if any more widely applicable general principles might be drawn therefrom.

² Hughes, "Recent Questions and Negotiations," *Am.J.Int'l.L.* (1924), 239.

The first part of the study presents an overview of minority problems in general and of the Armenian case in particular. The two chapters in Part I, while introductory in nature, constitute an essential part of the whole study. Without them, the significance of the Armenian minority problem from 1914 on cannot be thoroughly comprehended. Part II deals with the policies and activities of the three groups most interested in the Armenian problem during the World War. First, the policies of Turkey are discussed, then those of the Allies, and finally those of the Armenians. Part III takes up the various attempts made to solve the problem. Part IV presents a critical review of that solution and gives a summary of the principles or rules that might apply to other minorities.

The Armenian problem has, in its very essence, been a focus of controversy. Therefore, the writer has been careful, in interpreting the facts, to consider the opinions and statements of scholars and impartial and well-informed observers. While secondary sources have at times been used in describing issues collateral to the main problem, such as certain discussions at the Paris Peace Conference, the central thesis is based upon primary sources, partly in manuscript form, presented here for the first time. Nevertheless, there is a mass of material which in 1934 was not yet accessible to the researcher. Into this category fall a part of the Armenian archives as well as the minutes of the sub-committees of the Lausanne Conference of 1922. These and similar documents await examination by future scholars. It may be that this material will yield entirely new data on the questions involved and necessitate a radical change in both the point of view and the conclusions drawn therefrom. However, this writer working at the present moment (1934) must, of necessity, confine herself to the facts at hand.

In a work dealing with a contemporary problem, there are apt to be certain other omissions that might not so readily occur when treating a more remote historical question. With the passage of time, references are sifted, obscure data become better known, documents published in distant lands are more widely distributed, and publications in little known languages are translated. To these limitations in the presentation of a complete work must be added human limitations of time and energy. The author has tried to present as complete and as scholarly a study as possible, but no one is more conscious of its obvious and inescapable imperfections.

Although objectivity has been the strict aim, the writer acknowledges from the outset that the fact of Armenian parentage makes objectivity more difficult. Natural sympathy cannot be easily discarded. But to be forewarned

is to be forearmed. Real danger occurs and injustice is done only when impartiality is claimed, but impossible to fulfill. The acknowledged disadvantage of a predisposed sympathy to one side is offset in a measure by certain advantages that come from having such a subject treated by one of Armenian origin. Among these are intuitive insight into the psychology of the people, acquaintance with the customs and traditions of the nation, and a natural interest in the topic.

The staffs of the University of Pennsylvania Library, the New York Public Library, the Library of Bryn Mawr College, and the League of Nations Library have rendered me particularly courteous services. To the members of the Department of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, who have inspired me in the study of public affairs and who have helped me with this work, I wish to express my thanks. I am especially indebted to Dr. James T. Young, head of the Department, for his unfailing guidance and encouragement. I am under a further obligation to the University of Pennsylvania, which, by its award of the Penfield Scholarship, enabled me to carry on my research in Europe. Gabriel Effendi Noradounghian and Mr. Avetis Aharonian made possible the use of part of the important documents in the Armenian Archives in Paris. Vahram Nubar Bey and Mr. Armen Pasdermadjian also befriended me while abroad. The latter permitted the examination of a collection of valuable letters concerning the Armenian negotiations. Dr. Andre N. Mandelstam, former director of the Legal Section of the Czarist Russian Department of Foreign Affairs, placed at my disposal important literature on the Armenian Question. Mr. A. Safrastian, a former member of the Armenian National Delegation, has given me much useful information. He has devoted countless hours assisting me. Professors Paul Montoux and Paul Guggenheim of the Post-Graduate Institute of Higher International Studies of Geneva, Switzerland as well as Professor Th. Ruysen and Mr. C. A. Macartney have looked over the dissertation and made important suggestions. Mr. Roland S. Morris and Dr. William E. Lingelbach have reviewed the manuscript and given me constructive criticism. The author is deeply grateful to Dr. Charles G. Fenwick, of Bryn Mawr College, for his stimulating advice and helpful interest. His pertinent observations have steered me clear of numerous errors. For the views expressed in regard to controversial issues and the conclusion reached, the author, alone, is responsible.